

2. Dialects

197 Guthrie lists seven dialects, including three principal ones: "YAUNDE,
797 BULU, Ntum, Meka, Zimu /Nzimu/, FAN, Make." It would proba-
bly be better to speak of three dialect areas corresponding to the three
groups—Beti, Fang, Boulou—already defined, each area containing
a predominant speech, which is always the one transcribed by mission-
aries. The importance of this sociological phenomenon is underlined
by the fact that the transcribed dialects tend sometimes to extend
beyond and sometimes to shrink within the corresponding ethnological
area, in conjunction with nonlinguistic factors, the principal one
being the religious affiliation of the speakers. Likewise, it is estab-
lished that in certain areas a mother tongue coexists with a written
dialect learned at mission schools and spoken by Christian converts.

The predominant dialect in the Beti area is Ewondo, the working
language of the Catholic mission, which is rapidly supplanting the
Beti (Ati) dialect: properly so called of the Sanaga Valley. The Eton
dialect, for instance, which was more Ati than Pahouin on the eve
of the 1914 war (Nekes), is today completely assimilated; Tsinga and
Mangisa are on the way to being so. Finally, Ewondo as a trade
language is gaining ground in the north and east, as already indicated.
In the south, on the contrary, though it may be replacing Bané and
Fong and even be making superficial inroads into the Catholic cantons
of the Boulou-speaking area; it is losing out to Boulou in the districts
evangelized by the American Presbyterian Mission. Thus the Bané,
the Fong, and certain Protestant Ewondo are in fact bilingual; they
speak as their mother tongue a dialect close to Ewondo, while they
write, pray, or sing in Boulou.

197 Boulou is therefore gaining in the Ewondo linguistic area in the
north. Toward the east, it is gaining among the Mekaé and Kozimé,
has supplanted Fang among the isolated Fang groups of the north, and
serves as the cultivated language among the /20/ Cameroons Ntounmou
198 and Mvaé (except for Catholics) and as a trade language at Kribi and
in Spanish Guinea. It even competes with Fang as a written language
in northern Gabon. In the Catholic sectors it is putting up quite a
good resistance to Ewondo, except where it comes in contact with
Bané and Fong.

Fang has supplanted Ntounmou in the Woleu-N'Tem region—ex-
cept in Bitam District, where it is in competition with Boulou—and